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Vasiliki Limberis

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“Religion” as the Cipher for Identity: The Cases of Emperor Julian, Libanius, and Gregory Nazianzus

Vasiliki Limberis
Temple University

In this paper I shall explore how religion functioned as a signifier of identity for Emperor Julian, his friend and teacher, Libanius, and his jealous enemy, Gregory Nazianzus, during the bewildering period of Julian’s short reign and sudden death. However, before discussing each man’s case, it will be useful to clarify the conceptual boundaries of the discussion. Because the term “religion,” as used in the academic world, is problematic for analyzing fourth-century culture, it is first necessary to isolate the concept of religion from the process of universalization. Drawing on the analyses of several post-colonialist theorists, I shall show why the term requires this disengagement, and why its meaning is best understood in light of the complications of specific historical circumstances. Once this issue has been broached, I shall introduce a theoretical basis for viewing “culture” as a commodity that was used by Christianity and pagan religions¹ from 314–365, when, for the

¹A word about the use of “pagan” religion in this paper. I am aware that this word and what it implies has a problematic history both from and within Christian literature and scholarship. David Frankfurter (*Religion in Roman Egypt* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998] 33–36) has carefully elaborated the problems inherent in this word. These include pejorative connotations and the erasure of local, unique custom and rituals for the purpose of establishing a generic, monolithic pagan religion of the Mediterranean basin. This invented “paganism” has served as a base category for scholars, although it never existed as a religion. I have chosen to use the term “pagan” in the sense of Pierre Chuvin (*A Chronicle of the Last Pagans* [trans. B. A. Archer; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990]): “paganism as a religion of the homeland in its narrowest sense: the city and its outlying countryside. Through-

most part, both sides enjoyed a rest from institutional persecution.² I shall also discuss how the concepts of religion and learning were brokered as cultural commodities by these same social groups. Having established this theoretical framework as the basis of my analysis, I shall turn to the investigation of what religion is for Julian, Libanius, and Gregory Nazianzus, how it fits into their own self-image, and what role each envisions for religion as corporate identity for civilized people of the *oikoumene*.

■ Historicizing "Religion"

The term religion is laden with the post-fourth-century church's construction of the Christian ideology, that successfully unites the concept of universality and religion. Academic discourse has succeeded in further complicating the term religion by essentializing it. The eminent anthropologist Clifford Geertz has been successful in disseminating such a view of religion.³ Geertz proposes a transhistorical framework that he claims can be applied to any society, anywhere, anytime, with the purpose of yielding up the truth about religion; his definition of religion is "a system of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic."⁴

Talal Asad has shown that Geertz's essentialist definition of religion is a product of the western Christian discourse itself, specifically that of the post-Enlightenment period, that has entered the common parlance of naturalized discourse. Asad has successfully challenged this definition of religion by untangling the rhetoric that disconnects religion from history, religion from culture, and religion from power. By carefully examining medieval Christianity, Asad has shown that religion is not "merely an arbitrary collection of elements and processes that we happen to call 'religion.'"⁵

out antiquity, 'paganism' was a mosaic of established religious traditions linked to the political order." To this definition, I would add that the variations in pagan religions are not only geographical, but also intellectual and sociological. This holds true for Christianity as well. See the discussion of personal religion, civic religion, and philosophical religion in Vasiliki Limberis, *Divine Heiress, The Virgin Mary and the Creation of Christian Constantinople* (London: Routledge, 1994) 1–10.

²H. A. Drake, "Lambs into Lions," *Past and Present* 153 (1996) 27–29.

³Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in idem, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) 90; critiqued by Talal Asad, "Religion as an Anthropological Category," in idem, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) 29–33.

⁴Ibid., as quoted by Asad, *Genealogies*, 29–30.

⁵Ibid., 29.

Asad has identified the greatest problems of Geertz's theory of religion. A definition that relegates religion to the symbolic world—and that claims religion manifests itself in certain rites and doctrines and produces specific attitudes in believers—bears an uncanny resemblance to the history of the church in Europe since the postmedieval period. It mirrors the historical process whereby religion became disengaged from the power structures of the emerging European states and reflects the brutal conflicts between Protestants and Catholics during the sixteenth century, as Protestant ideas of religion gained ascendancy and began to dominate economically powerful northwest Europe. It echoes the post-Enlightenment ideals of religion, categorizing religion as a matter of personal conscience and belief.⁶ However, this essentialized definition does not bear any resemblance to religion in the fourth century. The power of certain academic disciplines to observe, define, and codify unreflectively has been an indispensable tool for this kind of Eurocentric cultural imperialism.⁷ As Garth Fowden has so eloquently argued: "We are also forced to recognize that Eurocentricity is a choice, not a viewpoint imposed by history. There are roads out of antiquity that do not lead to the Renaissance."⁸ Geertz's definition of religion does not acknowledge this process of historical contingency.

Thus what appears in this definition to be self-evident, namely that religion is essentially a matter of symbolic means linked to ideas of the general order, expressed through both rites and doctrine, that it has generic functions and features, and that it must not be confused with any of its particular historical or cultural forms, is, in fact, a view that is grounded in a specific Christian history, evolving long after the fourth century.⁹ Moreover, it is complicit in relegating other concepts of religion to the periphery of academic discourse, granting them an inferior, even exotic, status.¹⁰ From the vantage point of post-colonial criticism, Asad offers a more circumscribed definition of religion that acknowledges the specificity of each one:

My argument . . . is not just that religious symbols are intimately linked to social life (and so change with it), or that they usually support dominant political power (and occasionally oppose it). It is those different kinds of practice and discourse that are intrinsic to the field in which religious representations acquire their identity and their truth-

⁶Ibid., 205.

⁷Edward W. Said, "Yeats and Decolonization," in Terry Eagleton, Frederic Jameson, and Edward W. Said, eds., *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) 72.

⁸Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 9.

⁹Ibid.; Asad, *Genealogies*, 42.

¹⁰Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993) xiii.

fulness. From this it does not follow that the meaning of religious practices and utterances are to be sought in social phenomena, but only that their possibility and their authoritative status are to be explained as products of historically distinctive disciplines and forces.¹¹

With this definition of religion in mind, although my understanding of religion does not exclude myths of gods, rites, and liturgical obligations, I hypothesize that for Julian, Libanius, and Gregory Nazianzus these are all intertwined with their need to appropriate Greek learning as a crucial element of identity. With this view of religion, so specific to location of time, place, and production, I will now address how it operates as an aspect of culture.

■ Culture as Commodity

There are three aspects to the meaning of the term culture used here. First, culture is the system by which a social order is expressed, reproduced, experienced, and investigated.¹² Second, culture refers to those phenomena that are considered cultivated, esteemed, and even noble: "Each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought."¹³ Literature, art, and learning all embrace this definition. Finally, culture almost always becomes allied with a nation or a state, providing the sole criterion for delineating civilization from what is barbaric. Hence culture is the key factor in the process of identity-formation; on a rudimentary level, culture *is* identity.¹⁴ A concept of cultural identity that inherently names "same" and "other" brings to the fore the "problem of the ambivalence of cultural authority."¹⁵ As Said puts it, "There is in all nationally defined cultures, I believe, an aspiration to sovereignty, to sway, and dominance."¹⁶ Enhanced by the power to bestow identity, religion in the fourth century fits readily within this last concept of culture.

Julian's reign gives scholars of late antiquity the opportunity to examine a society going through a transition. During this period, older forms of culture were challenged by the incorporation of "incompatible or undigested new elements."¹⁷ In a real sense these years provide a glimpse of the process of acculturation that had been going on for several centuries between Christianity and the wider Roman world. Since the beginning, Christianity and pagan cultures had encountered each other in a process "that was not part of the continuum of past and present."¹⁸ These

¹¹Asad, *Genealogies*, 53–54.

¹²Said, *Culture*, 3.

¹³*Ibid.*, xiii.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) 34.

¹⁶Said, *Culture*, 15.

¹⁷Raymond Williams, *The Sociology of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 200.

¹⁸Bhabha, *Location*, 7.

encounters produced “a sense of the new,” and demanded acts of cultural translation.¹⁹ Yet these acts of cultural translation preserved bits of the past as Christians and pagans attempted to achieve their “own kinds of continuity with it.”²⁰

This phenomenon is most obvious in Constantine’s successful attempts to forge a peaceful political coexistence between pagans and Christians for the better part of the fourth century.²¹ By focusing on games and shows at the Hippodrome, and by actively discouraging animal sacrifices as legitimate public displays of civic loyalty, Constantine created an unprecedented environment for cultural production and shared cultural identity between Christians and pagans. What Drake terms “sufficient common ground between them” (that is, Christians and pagans) can be viewed as a newly-forged cultural inheritance that accommodated both Christians and pagans while representing, in part, a break with the past cultures of both sides. Moreover, this new culture, acceptable to both Christian and pagan, informed the identity of each side in ways that allowed for a stable community and a gradual, almost imperceptible, shift of loyalty.

For Gregory Nazianzus, like other educated, upper-class men and women who were at least second-generation Christians born into a Christian home, a case can be made that this “peace of Constantine” enabled him to identify himself by the criteria of the wider culture “by ties of kinship and tradition,” ancestry, and local custom.²² Because of this identification, Gregory Nazianzus would have stood in contrast to those people newly converted to Christianity, who were “defined by an allegiance” rather than by a tradition or land.²³ Never having lived as a person on the margins of society, as Christians from earlier times or lower classes would have done, Gregory’s fight was for “culture as a strategy of survival,” brought on by Julian’s anti-Christian policies.²⁴ It was the crisis resulting from Julian’s legislation that exposed the undercurrent of cultural production that was common to both Christian and pagan. And although one might expect the fierce quality of the rhetoric of Julian and Gregory of Nazianzus, as they vie for the right to define their mutual culture, we shall see that even Libanius was not left untouched by the changing valences of culture, religion, and identity.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Williams, *Sociology*, 184.

²¹Drake, “Lambs,” 22.

²²Ibid., 25. I realize that, on the face of it, I am using Drake’s argument for exactly the opposite point that he is making in his article, but since I have qualified Gregory Nazianzus and his ilk as Christians by birth and not as converts, I think that I am being consistent with him.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Bhabha, *Location*, 172.

■ Julian

Julian, a powerfully enigmatic figure, was in many respects an innovator within pagan religion, with all its variations of customs, rites, and divine identities particular to each locale in the Roman empire. Although he believed that he was resuscitating the old religion, in practice, Julian created a new one, a blend of philosophy, pagan ritual, and myth. His *Letter to a Priest* and his *Misopogon* suggest that while his pagan religion was his own invention, it was influenced to some degree by his experience of Christianity.²⁵ As will become clear, Julian's religion for the masses was idiosyncratic in three aspects. First, he assumed that the one supreme God, known by many names, is moral and a lover of humanity, and that people can learn morality and philanthropy through imitation of this supreme being's example. Second, he claimed that the one God is invisible, incorporeal, and knowable by the intellect alone. Finally, Julian institutionalized paganism, stressing public ritual, pomp, and sacrifice in ways that were heretofore unknown.

In the *Letter to a Priest* Julian instructs the pagan priest to take care of the poor and to lead a moral life. His justification for this injunction is not at all consonant with the non-philosophical pagan tradition, although it fits quite well with concepts of the one Platonic God: "God who naturally loves human beings, has more kindness for those who love their fellows."²⁶ In the *Misopogon*, Julian is shocked not only at the nasty mocking with which the Antiochenes taunt him, he is stunned in his naiveté at their ribaldry and lack of pious attention to the sacrificial rites. In fact, Julian's insistence on infusing his pagan religion with a code of moral behavior—a kind of *sophrosyne*—diminished its appeal to the masses from the outset.²⁷

Although Julian truly hated Christianity and the kind of people it produced—his older brother and father were murdered by Christians—we find little evidence for his religious ideals in his anti-Christian polemic.²⁸ We can, however, glean his ideas from practical letters and some of the orations. Again, in his *Letter to a Priest*, Julian writes that it is

our duty to preach reverence to the gods, to honor their temples and statues. For we ought not to give heed to all philosophers, not the doctrines of all, but only to those philosophers and those of their doctrines that make men god fearing, and teach concerning the gods, first

²⁵Rowland Smith, *Julian's Gods* (London: Routledge, 1995) xv, 6.

²⁶Julian *Letter to a Priest* 299, in *Julian* (LCL; trans. Wilmer C. Wright; 3 vols.; London: William Heinemann, 1923) 3. 321, 323.

²⁷Smith, *Julian's Gods*, xiv.

²⁸Julian *Or.* 7.228–31. Understandably, Julian was terrorized by the murders in his family and his forced exiles at the behest of the Flavians. For a while, his despair led him to suicidal thoughts, but he was saved, he says, by a dream from Helios and Athena.

that they exist, secondly that they concern themselves with the things of this world, and further that they do no injury at all either to mankind or to one another out of jealousy or envy or enmity.²⁹

These are odd qualities to attribute to the Olympian pantheon.

Looking at the texts upon which Julian bases his theology, one sees just where Julian diverges from the “old” religion. In Hesiod’s *Work and Days*, the best that can be said of the gods is that they are “immortal,” “all-seeing,” “all-knowing,” and “far-seeing.”³⁰ The most that the gods do for humans is pity them, or respect them for their diligence and intelligence. But this respect can act as a curse as well: often one god will admire a crafty human, while another will envy the exceptional mortal and cause him/her trouble. One famous example of this appears in the *Odyssey*, when Zeus, in conversation with Athena, blames Poseidon for the problems that Odysseus must face.

How should I, then, forget godlike Odysseus, who is beyond all mortals in wisdom, and beyond all has paid sacrifice to the immortal gods, who holds broad heaven? Nay, it is Poseidon, the earth-enfolder, who is ever filled with stubborn wrath because of the Cyclops, whom Odysseus blinded of his eye.³¹

Moreover, the gods gave humans two kinds of strife, one that is utterly “blame-worthy,” the other fairly understandable for those humans with some intelligence. This second kind of strife causes humans to vie with one another for honor, wealth, and power: “This strife is wholesome for men.”³² In stark contrast to *philanthropia*, “the gods keep hidden from men the means of life.”³³ The most that humans can do to overcome their divine fates is summed up nicely at the end of *Works and Days*: “That man is happy and lucky in them who knows all these things and does his work without offending the deathless gods, who discerns the omens of birds and avoids transgression.”³⁴

Unlike Hesiod, Julian insisted that there is but one supreme God who is called by many names. His theological opinions, adumbrated in commentaries on Homer and Hesiod, are less than successful in putting forth the notion of a unified godhead, benevolent, philanthropic, yet based on the myths. In *Hymn to Helios* he writes:

²⁹Julian *Letter to a Priest* 301, in *Julian* 3. 327.

³⁰Hesiod *Works and Days* 110, 238, 267 (LCL; trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White; London: William Heinemann, 1936).

³¹Homer *Odyssey* 1.63–70 (LCL; trans. A. T. Murray; 2 vols.; London: William Heinemann, 1934) 1. 7.

³²Hesiod *Works and Days* 11–24.

³³Ibid. 42.

³⁴Ibid. 826–28.

For this reason Plato seems to me to be right in calling Pluto a provident (φρόνιμος) deity. The same god we also name "Serapis," that is, "Aides," "Invisible," clearly because he is the object of the intellect alone: up to whom the souls ascend of such as have led the best and most righteous lives. We must not suppose him (Pluto) the terrible being that Myth describes him; but a mild and benevolent one, who completely frees souls from the trammels of Birth.³⁵

Julian's efforts to unite Homeric myth and Neoplatonism are unsatisfying and strained.

From Zeus, that is to say, who is the same with the Sun, in the same way as the sovereign Apollo is a partner with the Sun by means of the singleness of their conceptions. So, indeed, must we believe that Athene, who received her own being from him (and who is also his perfect Intelligence), binds together the other deities, with the Sun into unity, without confusion of person with Sun, sovereign of the universe.³⁶

In some aspects, Julian's religion is consistent with Greco-Roman tradition. It is noteworthy, for example, that for Julian, religion is a public duty, whose obligations are designated by the civic calendar and local custom.³⁷ This includes pleasing a host of gods by ritual sacrifice, proper fulfillment of ritual obligations, and festive celebrations in feasts, theatre events, games, or contests, all arranged in an annual cycle. Nor was Julian much of an innovator when he emphasized the ritual, even the magical, aspects of religion; he was simply tapping into current trends of the day, a combination of philosophy and cultic ritual. However, despite the elements of Julian's religious program that appear traditional, it was his attempt to democratize religion that represented his most startling innovation. Using the power of the imperial office, Julian brought pagan religion out of the esoteric realm of the philosophical elite, and into a more public and popular sphere.

Part of Julian's new religion can be understood by what was *nouveau* in philosophical schools. Julian sought to combine the current philosophical esoterica with the age-old duties of Greek religion. For most of the fourth century, philosophers at the best schools gained their reputations much less from their dialectic skill than from their daemonic powers that manifested their greatness through supernatural signs.³⁸ The philosopher's authority resided in his ability to manifest holiness, and

³⁵Julian "Upon the Sovereign Sun," in *Julian the Emperor* (trans. C. W. King; London: George Bell and Sons, 1888) 226.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 243.

³⁷Limberis, *Heiress*, 1–10, Chuvin, *Chronicle*, 10. Although one must exercise caution in generalizing about Greco-Roman religions, Chuvin's assessments are nevertheless quite reasonable.

³⁸Smith, *Julian's Gods*, 105; Richard Lim, *Public Disputation, Powers, and Social Order in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995) 33, 46.

his ability to prove that holiness is genuine, rather than in his skill at rational disputation.³⁹ From the time of Plotinus (d. 270), it had become common to claim that a philosopher's skill was innate. There is some debate today as to whether this phenomenon is the result of pressure from Christianity, whose philosophers had long "claimed a monopoly on wisdom."⁴⁰

Along with this focus on the holiness of the philosopher himself, in the best schools there was a growing interest in theurgy.⁴¹ Porphyry had had his doubts about some of Plotinus's ideas concerning the role of ritual theurgy, but there was little he could do to stop the growing convergence between religion and philosophy. The best he could do was to teach a nuanced role for theurgy: it helped those who were not able to philosophize, purifying the lower parts of the soul.⁴² During this period, it is important to remember that there was a bitter rivalry between the Christians, who had succeeded in taking on the mantle of philosophy, and Plotinus's school. Porphyry, for one, wrote a scathing critique of the Christian religion.

Porphyry's student, Iamblichus (d. 325), capitalized on the contemporary interest in theurgy. Christians soon categorized him as a charlatan and dishonest magician, but this is polemical. Because Iamblichus thought that the gods gave theurgy and that it was ineffable, he was able to regularize the rites and make them more familiar to people in philosophical circles.⁴³ His position as head of such a prestigious school also bestowed authority on theurgy.⁴⁴ Iamblichus sought to systematically merge philosophy and the powers of the world that controlled the inexplicable events in everyday life—disease, drought, famine, failed crops, curses, superstition, prophecy—in ways that appropriated the realm of witchcraft and demonology. His philosophy legitimated venerable rites of sacrifice and divination, providing "theoretical justification for the ancient cults of the Greco-Roman world."⁴⁵ As Porphyry's successor, Iamblichus became famous for turning the *Chaldaean Oracles* into sacred literature, and, most significantly for our purposes, he was successful at disseminating the idea that all Greek culture (*paideia*) was a "product of divine inspiration and therefore sacred in character."⁴⁶

³⁹Smith, *Julian's Gods*, 105; Lim, *Disputation*, 46.

⁴⁰Smith, *Julian's Gods*, 105–109; Lim, *Disputation*, 62.

⁴¹There is debate among scholars as to the nature of theurgy and its role in Julian's life. It is not my purpose to explore this debate in this essay; for a concise discussion of the issues, see Smith, *Julian's Gods*, 47–58, 105–22.

⁴²Porphyry, *On the Return of the Soul*, as cited in Smith, *Julian's Gods*, 105.

⁴³Gregory Shaw, "Divination in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus," in Robert M. Berchman, ed., *Mediators of the Divine* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1998) 233.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

⁴⁶Polymnia Athanassiadi, *Julian, an Intellectual Biography* (London: Routledge, 1992) 9.

Julian's own conversion to philosophical religion illustrates its dynamism at the time. In the early 350's, Julian found himself in exile in Macellum, studying in isolation. Finding it unsatisfying, he obtained permission to go to Nicomedia, where the newly famous Libanius was teaching. The dynamic teacher fascinated Julian, but Libanius wisely limited his contacts with the young relative of Emperor Constantius. Nevertheless, Julian was able to read the texts of Libanius's lectures, although his spiritual restlessness led him to Pergamon, in search of more satisfying venues.

The head of the school, Aedesius, Iamblichus' successor, was also wary of taking on a student who was related to the Emperor, so he told Julian to seek out his students as teachers. Eusebius, who became too intellectual and conservative for Julian's tastes, was the first to instruct Julian. Julian found his spiritual home with Aedesius's other student, Maximus of Ephesus, against whose theurgic activities Eusebius had warned him. Maximus was a flamboyant, charismatic Neoplatonist, who relied much less on intellectual contemplation than on magical pyrotechnics. After some time of preparation, Maximus initiated Julian into the mysteries of Hecate.

Julian's religion required—if not an experiential transformation—at least a commitment, and thus from the outset dissuaded the common people. Indeed, theurgy was popular, but only in the rarified circles of philosophical schools. Because of this, Julian failed at his attempt to mobilize the masses behind his movement for an organizational paganism. He had sought to create a pagan establishment that looked somewhat like the ecclesiastical structure of Christianity, yet remained consistent with his policy of decentralization.⁴⁷ As bishops ran dioceses on a local level but formed a recognizable institution throughout the empire, so pagan priests, operating autonomously in their cities, would provide goods, services, festival events, entertainment, education, and even pagan monasteries for all the people. Although he envisioned a variety of local gods and cults all united under “one father and king of all things,”⁴⁸ this organization would be based in the cities, yet recognizable throughout the *oikoumene* by its sobriety and by the services it would provide. Julian's institutional religion “formed an ideal community which bore some resemblance to the Christian church.”⁴⁹

Julian's short reign eclipsed the chances of success for such a program, but from the evidence, it was certainly unpopular. In a sense, religious ritual helped philosophical schools gain adherents, but ironically it did not help to spread Julian's

⁴⁷J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Antioch, City and Imperial Administration in the Later Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972) 12.

⁴⁸Julian *Against the Galilaeans* 345, in *Julian* 3. 419.

⁴⁹Liebeschuetz, *Antioch*, 16.

religion to the masses. Although Julian took his role as *pontifex maximus* quite seriously, conducting sacrifices whenever he could, few people could keep up with so many sacrifices at so many temples. Julian's religious zeal may in fact have been detrimental to his cause: when he sacrificed a large number of animals at Antioch, the general public was scandalized to witness soldiers gorging themselves on sacred meat, since there was a food shortage at the time.⁵⁰

Not only did Julian expect the festal calendar to the traditional gods to be meticulously observed, he also ascribed *philanthropia* to the gods, a quality the Platonists' god had always possessed, but, as indicated above, one not commonly, nor easily, attributable to the Olympian deities. Furthermore, Julian expected people to imitate the gods' *philanthropia* through a moral life. This, too, signaled innovation; members of the same social group—burial societies, guilds, and the exclusivist echelons of class—had provided for each other long before Julian, but this had been an exclusive privilege. Julian was attempting to universalize this phenomenon, giving everyone access to the perks of these societies without actually having to be a member.⁵¹

Julian writes wearily to Arsacius, high priest of Galatia, stressing his innovations, because “the Hellenic religion does not yet prosper as I desire, and it is the fault of those who profess it.”⁵² He reiterates that the priests should exercise modesty in everything, not frequenting theaters and taverns. What irks him most, apparently, is Christian charity for the poor and for strangers. Likewise, the fact that “no Jew ever has to beg”⁵³ seems to be a great embarrassment to him. His greatest enemies were succeeding in the very social programs at which he was failing.

Julian tried to base his program on “scripture,” relying on Greek tradition: “Accustom those who love the Hellenic religion to those good works by teaching them that this was your practice of old.” He cites Eumaeus in the *Odyssey*: “Stranger, it is not right for me to slight a stranger, even though one of less account than you were to come: for all strangers and beggars are from Zeus.”⁵⁴ Significantly, however, he omits the swineherd's next words that blame the gods for his sorry state: “For true it is the gods have blocked the return of him who would have loved me with all kindness.”⁵⁵ This *philanthropia* comes from Odysseus, not the gods.

⁵⁰Samuel N. C. Lieu, *The Emperor Julian, Panegyric and Polemic* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1986) 51.

⁵¹Chuvin, *Chronicle*, 47.

⁵²Julian *Letter to Arsacius*, in *Julian* 3. 67.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 3. 71.

⁵⁴Homer *Odyssey* 14.56 (ET 2. 41).

⁵⁵*Ibid.* 14.61.

Oddly enough, Julian enjoins priests to abandon the custom of the *adventus* ceremony, the colorful pageant of greeting commonly accorded a government official. Even the Christians had continued this custom. This innovation alone, asking pagan priests to isolate themselves from "prominence in public life," separates his vision of religion from customary precedents.⁵⁶ In this, Julian may also have been overzealously copying the Christians; ecclesiastical legislation from the Council of Elvira (c. 303) stated that the presidents of city councils (*duumvirs*) could not attend Christian services during their tenure, and priests of the imperial cult (*flamines*) were excommunicated.⁵⁷ However, he was also emphasizing the need for priests to cultivate interior piety and philanthropic intention.⁵⁸ Consonant with this stipulation, he ordered all priests to be suppliants of the Mother of the Gods.⁵⁹

How preposterous Julian's religious program appeared to the majority of pagans is painfully evident in Julian's treatise, *Misopogon*, when the Antiochenes' jeering, as they mocked his philosopher's beard (among other perceived offenses) wounds Julian.⁶⁰ Julian was just too sober for the everyday pagan. Not only were people neglecting the temples, they certainly were not practicing philanthropy and, most unenlightened of all, they were hosting huge private parties for themselves.⁶¹

Despite their fears of bloody persecution and new calls for martyrdom, Julian did not immediately legislate against Christians when he became emperor in 361. Instead, his method of attack was to disempower Christians in public life: he restored all property to the temples, recalled all the Christian clergy who had been exiled during the various theological controversies, and barred Christians from serving in the Praetorian guard.⁶² However, his most powerful move against the Christians was his edict preventing them from the teaching profession.⁶³ Harking back to his spiritual/intellectual education, Julian used Iamblichus's arguments to bar them from the classrooms. As Iamblichus had stated, Greek learning was a divine creation, and men who scorned the gods, the myths and their versions of morality and honor, had no business teaching others:

By the gods, I do not wish the Galileans to be put to death or beaten illegally, or to be maltreated in any way. But I declare that those who revere the gods should be given absolute preference over them. For

⁵⁶Oliver Nicholson, "The 'Pagan Churches' of Maximinus Daia and Julian the Apostate," *JEH* 45 (1994) 2.

⁵⁷Chuvin, *Chronicle*, 15.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁹Julian *Letter to Arsacius*, in *Julian* 3. 73.

⁶⁰Julian *Misopogon*, 364, in *Julian* 2. 493, 495.

⁶¹*Ibid.*

⁶²Socrates *Church History*, 3.13.1.

⁶³"Edict against Christians Teaching," 362; *Cod. Theo.* 13.3.5.

practically everything has been turned upside down thanks to the folly of the Galileans, and it is the favor of the gods that preserves us all. So we must honor the gods and those men and cities which revere them.⁶⁴

Through the edict, Julian successfully completed that for which Neoplatonic thinkers had been striving throughout most of the fourth century: the unification of Greek learning and religion. That it was now legitimized by the state was unprecedented, and potentially the most powerful means to obliterate the Christian presence from elite culture. In the second century, it had in fact been Greek *paideia* that had afforded Christian thinkers an entrée into the Greco-Roman cultural world—albeit in a purely intellectual fashion. Nevertheless, one of the strongest themes in *Against the Galilaeans* is Julian's belief that Christianity is antithetical to the civilized life.⁶⁵

For the most part, however, Julian found himself alone in his zeal. Ammianus Marcellinus, a scholar and ardent supporter of Julian, saw the order as inappropriate and unnecessary.⁶⁶ In addition, as did most of the pagan masses, he also found the emperor's love of sacrifice and divination excessive.⁶⁷ Julian never understood that for most people religion was a way of life inherited from one's ancestors and local community.⁶⁸ To the plebeians, Julian's version of pagan religion appeared alien, and his attention to public displays of religion, to organization, intention, and moral behavior appeared more as ardor for a cause than as a return to traditional piety.

By prohibiting Christians from teaching the classics, Julian effectively reinforced the notion that *paideia* was still a way to display one's status, for *paideia* had always been a mark of class identity.⁶⁹ But Julian was doing much more than this, and what he sought to achieve with his legislation was indeed quite new. *Paideia*, when connected to one's religious identity, became a commodity used not primarily as a marker to identify social status, but rather as a tool to keep Christians on the periphery of Roman society. Yet there is a quality of urgency in this identification process, probably stemming from his negative experiences with Christianity.

Julian's successful disengagement of Greek learning from Christianity was unprecedented. Christians had never been barred from letters. Not only was this an effective political tool to stymie Christians, it had the remarkable effect of invent-

⁶⁴Julian *Letter to Atarbius*, in *Julian* 3. 123.

⁶⁵Smith, *Julian's Gods*, 209.

⁶⁶Ammianus Marcellinus *Res gestae* 22.10.7.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 25.4.17; 22.12.3–7.

⁶⁸Chuvin, *Chronicle*, 8–10.

⁶⁹Lim, *Disputation*, 138.

ing a new religion and religious identity for people in the Roman empire. For the first time, *paideia* became a prized commodity, one that Julian sought to control in order both to exclude Christians and to insure a kind of orthodoxy.

Under the guise of the restoration of Hellenic religion, Julian's program formed a reproduction of paganism, a pagan religion that bore the scars of his conflict with the former dominant religion, Christianity.⁷⁰ By claiming the residual elements of paganism mandatory for the proper observance of the gods, especially sacrifice, Julian breached the fragile neutrality between pagan and Christian for which Constantine's policies had made provision, however imperfect the peace had been.⁷¹

Ironically, Julian's religion was too earnest—even austere—to allow people to preserve local, idiosyncratic customs as their religion, as pagans had done for generations.⁷² Religion served as the rudimentary mark of identity for Julian; and identity was a public matter. And although a public matter, Julian's concept of Roman identity, tagged by religion and brokered by *paideia*, was exclusive.

■ Libanius

Julian's teacher and friend in correspondence, Libanius, had a much more traditional, Greco-Roman view of religion. He praised the young emperor for initiating the turn of events that restored the gods and traditional religion to their former grandeur. One must caution against too generalized a picture, however, for Libanius seemed to know that Julian's restoration was only temporary. Perhaps it may be argued that this is only hindsight, but his works on Julian betray a sad sense of loss at the passing of a particular Roman way of life and its cultural institutions. Above all, Libanius and Julian agreed that philosophical education and the pursuit of virtue were the foundations for religion. Libanius extols the emperor for "devoting himself to philosophy" which in turn makes it impossible to "maintain false ideas about the divine."⁷³ For Libanius, philosophical learning and religion are "akin," and he praises Julian for restoring learning, not religion, to its former position.⁷⁴

What Libanius actually believed about the gods is somewhat obscure, but it is clear enough that he believed they existed and could affect the daily lives of people. *Oration* 1, on Tyche, gives testimony to this,⁷⁵ for when he describes how Asclepius cured him, his gratitude toward the god is obvious,⁷⁶ while *Oration* 5 opens with

⁷⁰Williams, *Sociology*, 204.

⁷¹Drake, "Lambs," 27–29.

⁷²Chuvin, *Chronicle*, 47–48.

⁷³Libanius *Or.* 12.33–34, in *Selected Works* (LCL; trans. A. F. Norman; 2 vols.; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969) 1. 55.

⁷⁴Libanius *Funeral Or.* 18.157, 161, in *Selected Works* 1. 383, 385.

⁷⁵Libanius *Or.* 1; *TLG* translation.

⁷⁶*Ibid.* 1.143.

his declaration that he owes his life to Artemis's rescue.⁷⁷ However, further deductions about the deities from his writings are often obfuscated by his rhetorical skill. In his oration, *Pro templis*, written to Emperor Theodosius I, the reader is much more convinced of Libanius's power to persuade than by his claim that the gods protect the old and weak: "By massacring their protectors, you have been massacring these innocents."⁷⁸ And when he bemoans the fact that, since the temples are closed, there is no more assistance from the temple treasuries to those in need, it is vital to remember that he is writing after Julian's death.⁷⁹ Julian had regularized assistance to the poor with temple funds. Because Libanius, for the goals of rhetoric, exploits the images of the gods as attentive to human needs, his own views on them remain hidden and perhaps simply traditional.

Libanius's views of religion were pragmatic, even tangible, with regard to the sacred character of *paideia*. With regard to the gods' attentiveness to human prayer, Libanius's conclusion presents a shocking twist, "from the bottom of their hearts [these unarmed folk] invoke Ares, Athena, and the rest of the gods by whose counsels the issues of war are decided. . . . And the influence that prayers can have on the fortunes of war, we can observe in poetry."⁸⁰ Not in history, or empire! Libanius vivifies language and letters with the characteristics of a divine intermediary, and he claims that the greatest gift of the gods is oratory.⁸¹ For Libanius, then, religion, as known by the myths of the gods and their relationship to humanity, literally engenders learning; and it is learning that civilizes humanity and makes life worth living. As a gift of the gods to humanity, *paideia* becomes something of a religion itself.

Although he maintained that religion and learning were related, it was only when they were threatened that one sees where Libanius's emphasis lay. In one oration, he complains that, when the Christians were in power, religion was ruined and *learning* was nearly wrecked beyond repair. Libanius then extols Julian's restitution program: "He directed his actions to the *complete restoration of learning* to its position by honoring its exponents . . . and by composing discourses."⁸² Aesthetics, practical education, and moral values were attainable only through Greek education. *Paideia*, moreover, was the civilizing agent of humanity.⁸³

As a kind of intermediary between the human and divine worlds, *paideia* enabled a person to understand the gods, the myths, and ritual obligations of pagan religion correctly. For Libanius, the gods—while swayed by prayer and sacrifice

⁷⁷Ibid. 5.1; TLG translation.

⁷⁸Libanius *Pro templis* 30.20, 10, in *Selected Works* 2. 119, 121, 109, 111.

⁷⁹Libanius *Or.* 2.30, in *Selected Works* 2. 27.

⁸⁰Ibid. *Or.* 2.48.

⁸¹Libanius *Funeral Or.* 18.161.

⁸²Ibid. 18.157, 161 (emphasis added).

⁸³Liebeschuetz, *Antioch*, 16.

in exceptional cases—remain primarily aloof and arbitrary powers, rather than benevolent purveyors of *philanthropia*. In contrast to Julian's view of religion and *paideia*, Libanius saw *philanthropia* as a characteristic acquired by the pursuit of virtue, rather than by imitation of the gods.⁸⁴

This does not mean that Libanius's view of religion was solely intellectual. Religion in his view is intimately tied to civilization as lived in the *polis*. Libanius mentions the calendrical cycle of festivals celebrated annually to the gods in Antioch. With fondness and piety he describes the celebration of the New Year festival to Poseidon, in May the festival to Artemis, and the celebration of Calliope, the patron goddess of Antioch, in early summer.⁸⁵ Most scholars believe that the "immoral festival" that Libanius unequivocally denounces is the Maiumas, also held in May at Daphne in honor of Dionysius and Aphrodite.⁸⁶ In summer and fall, Libanius mentions the Olympic games to Zeus during leap years, and the wine festival of Dionysius.⁸⁷ When he bemoans the sad state of the city council, Libanius's sense of the strong connection between religion, as mediated by *paideia*, and the materialization of the civilized life in the city is palpable:

So, too, any responsible for any benefit towards one city binds all to himself, and when prayers rise from so many lips, what must we think their effect will be? . . . Therefore, in aiding the [city] councils, proffer aid also to the literature that is now cast aside and, by your correction of those who have scant regard for what is right, demonstrate that power has been recovered by theurgy from both council chamber and school room.⁸⁸

The kinds of rituals of religion so emphasized by Julian were decidedly secondary for Libanius. He stresses that Maximus of Ephesus's influence over Julian was intellectual, never mentioning theurgy, emphasizing instead Julian's love of learning.⁸⁹ For Libanius, religion is much less imbued with philosophical theurgy than it is for Julian. He was not so "modern" as Iamblichus or Maximus as to systematize the practice of philosophy, festal ritual responsibilities, and magic; even though he believed in the efficacy of magic, he did not practice it.⁹⁰ He credits the restoration of temple worship to Julian's conversion to paganism and his right

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Libanius *Or.*, 9.14–18; 1.1; 5.43–51; 1.102; 20.51; 40.13; as cited in Liebeschuetz, *Antioch*, 228–31.

⁸⁶Libanius *Or.* 41.16; 50.11; as cited in Liebeschuetz, *Antioch*, 231.

⁸⁷Libanius *Ep.* 661, 1480, 1288, 1212, as cited in Liebeschuetz, *Antioch*, 231.

⁸⁸Libanius *Or.* 20.49; 49.33.

⁸⁹Ibid.; René Braun and Jean Richier, *L'empereur Julien, de l'histoire à la légende (331–1715)*, (Paris: Société de l'Édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1978) 75.

⁹⁰Liebeschuetz, *Antioch*, 12.

to kingship.⁹¹ Libanius compares Julian to mythological figures: "You were for the body of our world what in legend Asclepius was for Hippolytus. You restored the dead to life, and now at last the title of emperor has gained fulfillment."⁹² Libanius comments on how good it is to see processions to gods, "one to this god, one to that,"⁹³ and equates these ritual honors with civilization and living under the law.

For Libanius, ritual religion was a mark of class distinction. While generally an elitist, a careful reading of one of his most famous treatises, *Pro templis*, addressed to Emperor Theodosius I, reveals that he viewed temples and their ritual function in festivals as an important civilizing agent for the lower classes:

Temples, sire, are the soul of the countryside: they mark the beginning of its settlement, and have been passed down through many generations to the people today. In them the farming communities rest their hopes for husbands, wives, children, and their oxen and the soil they sow and plant. . . .⁹⁴ It used to be the custom of country folk to assemble in large numbers at the homes of the village notables at holiday time, and to make sacrifice and hold a feast.⁹⁵

As a symbol of all pagan religion, temples were important to Libanius for another reason, they were an incarnation of civilization's cultural heritage. In his praise of Julian, Libanius sympathized with the emperor's grief over the "ruin of the temples."⁹⁶ When the Christians destroyed the bronze statue of Asclepius in Beroea, Libanius was aghast at the loss of such a beautiful work of art.⁹⁷

Libanius characterizes Julian's religious program in this light as well. When he writes to Julian on behalf of a friend, Aristophanes, he states, "Zeus in disgust at such goings on has put an end to that ailing regime and he transformed *public life* to an administration based on reason, and we can speak on matters relevant to an assembly."⁹⁸ Each person has public responsibility to the gods; his or her identity is public, not private. The *polis* and, more generally, the empire defines one's identity, and religion is a duty belonging to the literally *civilized* realm. Enunciating the hopes for Julian's accession to the Imperial purple, Libanius says in *Or.* 18.21: "that he should become ruler of the empire and that an end be put to the ruin of civilization, and that there be put in charge of the troubled world one who knows how to care for such ills."

⁹¹Libanius *Or.* 13.13, 15; 18.21.

⁹²Libanius *Or.* 13.42.

⁹³Libanius *Or.* 12.14–15.

⁹⁴Libanius *Pro templis* 30.9, 10.

⁹⁵*Ibid.* 30.19.

⁹⁶Libanius *Or.* 13.13.

⁹⁷Libanius *Or.* 30.21, 22.

⁹⁸Libanius *Or.* 14.3 (emphasis added).

Some of Libanius's thoughts regarding religion are apparent in his *Funeral Oration* for Julian. He praises Julian for not unleashing a religious pogrom against the Christians on his ascendancy to the throne. Libanius claims that the Christians expected newly contrived tortures against themselves, since "such had been the behaviour of his predecessors and they expected his measures to be more severe still."⁹⁹ He then proceeds with a circumspect exposition on why Julian practiced toleration of the Christians, that it has a great deal to do with the impossibility of coercing the conscience on religious matters (literally "opinion concerning the gods," δόξαν περὶ θεῶν).¹⁰⁰ In the literature of late antiquity, this is an exceptional example of the understanding of religion as a matter of both interior belief and ritual:

Anyone suffering from a physical disease can be cured by putting him under restraint, but a false religious creed (δόξαν δὲ περὶ θεῶν οὐκ ἀληθῆ) can never be eradicated by hacking and burning; even if a man's hand performs the sacrifice, his conscience reproaches him for it and condemns him for his bodily frailty attaching itself to the same objects of devotion as before. The result is a sort of illusion of change, not a real conversion of belief (οὐ μετὰστασις δόξης).¹⁰¹

In his way of thinking, power acting on behalf of religion does not create truth.

Religion, for Libanius, "opinions about the gods," derives from the gift of the gods (*paideia*) encountered in poetry, rhetoric, law, and even history. What is unique about Libanius's concept is that *paideia* is the goal itself, rather than attention to the gods, or theological speculation. *Paideia* brings about civilization, and the observance of religious ritual in sacrifices, festivals, and games, develops from it. Above all, Libanius gives the impression that the gods are quite pleased when human beings take up their gift and live in a civilized manner.

Because Libanius grew up in the Constantinian era, his own cultural inheritance was not untouched by Christianity. Although he chose, for the most part, to keep silent about Christianity, he interacted with Christian elites in the classroom and in correspondence. Because men like John Chrysostom and Basil of Caesarea used *paideia* for their own purposes, it was the Christians, not Libanius, who circumscribed learning and placed limits on its usefulness. Hence Libanius's declaration that Christians actually "wrecked" religion, reinforcing the fact that for him religion was not one of intellect alone, but fully enacted in ritual. For those who are not educated, there are ways for them to understand the gods' relationship to them and the world: through *paideia*'s incarnate life in the *polis*. For Libanius, religion was intimately tied to one's identity as a Roman citizen. To deny religion was to eschew, debilitate, and eventually destroy the civilization. And who, in his view, could have an identity without civilization?

⁹⁹Libanius *Funeral Or.* 18. 121.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁰¹*Ibid.* 18.122.

■ Gregory Nazianzus

This is precisely the conundrum in which Gregory Nazianzus found himself, and he had a visceral understanding of this paradox. It cut him to the quick, and, as did Julian, he fought as a person whose very existence is threatened. Julian's reign exacerbated Gregory's profound conflicts over his Roman identity and his Christian identity. Ironically, he waited to write the two invectives against Julian until shortly after the emperor's death, probably 364–365.¹⁰² Although it appears that Gregory did not know Libanius personally, he read his work, and it is not untenable to think that his invectives are a direct response to Libanius's attempt to “deify” Julian in his famous funeral oration, written after the emperor's untimely death.¹⁰³ At the least, Libanius's efforts created a legend regarding the uniqueness of Julian.

Although Gregory was quite angry over Julian's sweeping changes, his anger stemmed not from his devotion to Christ, but from his own devotion to Greek learning. Before Julian, Gregory the Christian could choose the degree to which he would immerse himself in his clandestine love—Greek philosophy. Julian's innovative creation of a state pagan religion founded on Greek philosophy, myth, and sacrificial cult was an abomination to Gregory, because Christians no longer controlled the cultural capital of the time, Greek *paideia*. Gregory attacks Julian primarily for attempting to create a monopoly over Greek learning for the pagans.¹⁰⁴

Before Julian, Gregory had not been forced to make a decision regarding Greek learning. His student days in Athens and what he learned there were crucial elements of his identity, and he was proud of both. This is evident in Gregory's work. In the orations there are 429 classical references, some for no purpose other than to

¹⁰²Gregory Nazianzus *Orations* 4 and 5, “Two Invectives Against Julian,” in C. W. King, trans., *Julian*, First Invective, 1–85; Second Invective, 86–121.

¹⁰³On the deification legend, see Ugo Criscuolo, “La difesa dell'ellenismo dopo Giuliano: Libanio e Teodosio,” *Koinonia* 14 (1990) 7–8. Libanius left Athens in 336, before Gregory Nazianzus and Basil of Caesarea arrived, around 352 and 356 respectively. He could have taught them there had he not turned down a position in 352. Both Sozomen (*Church History* 16.16) and Socrates (*Church History* 4.26) claim that Gregory Nazianzus and Basil of Caesarea were students of Libanius in Antioch after they left Athens. This is not correct. Basil met Libanius in Constantinople and corresponded with him, but Gregory had no occasion to meet him. See Philip Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 37; Denis Molaise Meehan, trans., *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, Three Poems* (Fathers of the Church 75; Washington D.C.: The Catholic University Press of America, 1987) 7. There seems little doubt, however, that Gregory read—and even imitated—Libanius's work. See M. Kertsch, “Eine Libanius-Reminiszenz bei Gregor von Nazianz, *Or.* 4,99?” *ViC* 46 (1992) 80–82 and Meehan, 20.

¹⁰⁴Kristoeffel Demoen, “The Attitude towards Greek Poetry in the Verse of Gregory Nazianzus,” in J. den Boeft and A. Hilhorst, eds., *Early Christian Poetry: A Collection of Essays* (Leiden: Brill, 1993) 238.

give him a chance to show what he knows.¹⁰⁵ Sometimes his allusions seem to give the effect of name-dropping, as in *Or.* 18.6, where he mentions Briareos with the hundred hands, or *Or.* 34.5, where he refers to the Mendesian goats.¹⁰⁶ Both of these references add rhetorical flourish; but few people in the audience would have been thrilled, let alone edified, by the allusions.

This is not to say that all of the mythological references in Gregory's work are superficial. The majority offer him an occasion to work out an exposition of his position using mythological subjects. Gregory is an exceptional author and profound thinker, and these qualities are reflected in his exegeses of mythological subjects. Above all, they show a constant preoccupation throughout his life with the competition for "truth" between Christianity and paganism.

Three examples cited in Kurmann's article show the depth of Gregory's use of mythology: *Or.* 14.28–29 on Kerdoos, *Or.* 25.2 on the contests in Olympia, and *Or.* 31.16 on the contention between gods.¹⁰⁷ In the first case, Gregory uses the rather obscure epithet of Hermes—Kerdos, literally "gain"—in his role as patron of tradesmen. Using Kerdoos as a metaphor, Gregory presents a complicated exegesis that distinguishes Christians from pagans by showing what the concept of "gain" means for each. However, as Kurmann points out, his interpretation is not wholly Christian: the connection that Gregory draws between gain and the pathos of avarice stems from the Stoic theologian Cornutus.¹⁰⁸ For Gregory, it is a question of whether the person rejoices in suffering, redirecting his desire for gain to the benefit of the poor that determines whether he is a Christian or not. For pagans, to do hard labor for themselves is to labor for God; for Christians, says Gregory, it is to do good for God.¹⁰⁹ His moral example is utterly infused with the mythic tale, yet there are layers of subtlety in his interpretation. It is not simply a facile comparison and contrast, as the nexus with the Stoic hermeneutic illustrates.

Gregory is more straightforward in his use of the trope of the Olympic games. The Christian *agon* has now replaced the various contests in Olympia, including theatrical ones. Gregory declares that his audience will be crowned with "our crowns," and makes allowances for their having participated in such religious events before: "... for such was both piety and honor, since time before received an ally of folly, such things were the custom by law."¹¹⁰ Of course, there is no longer an excuse to be "opposite God and the angels."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵P. Alois Kurmann, "τί μου ξένον μύθων τε καὶ διδαγμάτων: (Gregor von Nazianz, carm. 1,2,10,412) Zur Funktion mythologischer Figuren in Predigten Gregor von Nazianz," *Lebendiges Kloster, Festschrift für Abt. Georg Holzherr* (Freiburg: Paulus, 1997) 179.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 185, 194.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 180–84, 187–94.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁰⁹*PG* 35.897 A, B, "παρὰ Θεοῦ τὸ ταλαιπωρεῖν ἐκείνοις, παρὰ Θεοῦ τὸ εὖ πράττειν ἡμῖν."

¹¹⁰*PG* 35.1200–1201 C.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*

In this use of classical allusion, as well as in many others, it is noticeable that Gregory moves away from competing against paganism and toward a struggle that is more important to him: heresy.¹¹² His use of Olympia is a rhetorical vehicle to richly illustrate that Christianity is the true philosophy. At each point in the Olympic contest, whatever was contested, valued, praised, and won, the Christian now had an equal replacement, based entirely on the Olympian format. Olympic contests valued the struggle and suffering of the athlete; Christians likewise have Christ's passion. And victory belongs to each believer.¹¹³

Gregory's interpretations thus bespeak a kind of supercessionism: the Christians have inherited the wealth of Greek and Roman civilization. As such, Christianity became for him a new heuristic device, enabling him to make use of this valuable civilization. For Gregory there is much to learn from this inheritance, but it is vital that it all be interpreted through the lens of the church. This stance, therefore, makes it quite clear why Julian's intrusions would upset him so. In Gregory's view, God had ceded the Greco-Roman culture to the Christians.

The third example is less stylized, more candid, perhaps because it is part of the *Fifth Theological Oration*, the subject of which is "On the Holy Spirit," and Gregory has a great deal more time to speculate on the nature of the godhead. Gregory faults the mythic conception of the gods with factionalism, evil doings, mutability, and opposition. He says that these characteristics are endemic to the Olympian pantheon, reaching back to "their first causes, whom they call Oceani and Tethys and Phanetes, and by several other names; and last of all a certain god who hated his children through his lust to rule and swallowed up all the rest through his greediness, that he might become the father of all men and gods whom he miserably devoured, and then vomited forth again."¹¹⁴ It is impressive that Gregory takes the myth from Hesiod's *Theogony* seriously. He counters their claims to divinity on the grounds of mutability, factionalism, and doing evil. The pantheon's lack of unity in power and essence disqualifies its members as legitimate deities.

In describing Kronos's *paidophagia*, Gregory picked the most troubling myth of the time for pagans. Julian himself was tormented over the passage, since, in Neoplatonic fashion, he understood the myths as enhancing one's understanding of the Platonic one, good, true, and beautiful God. In the tract *Against the Galileans*, Julian admits that the Kronos myth is "unbelievable and abnormal."¹¹⁵ Gregory would have known this. His love of culture and learning, both explicitly and im-

¹¹²See Drake, "Lambs," 27–29, for an excellent discussion of how pagans and Christians coexisted quite well in the fourth-century, and how heretics were the "real" enemies.

¹¹³Kurmann, "τί μου ξένον," 190.

¹¹⁴Gregory Nazianus "On the Holy Spirit," 16, in *NPNF*, second series, v. 7, 322–23.

¹¹⁵Julian *Against the Galileans* (frag. 4), as quoted in Kurmann, "τί μου ξένον," 193, from E. Masaracchia, ed., *Giuliano Imperatore: Contra Galilaeos. Introduzione, testo critico e traduzione* (Roma: Edizioni dell' Ateneo, 1990).

plicitly, is evident in his writings. Greece was for him “young and his love,” but on his maturity, his dear love had to “yield to Christ,”¹¹⁶ “when the first down grew on my cheeks a keen passion for letters took possession of me.”¹¹⁷ In his *Panegyric on St. Basil*, he writes with clarity and conviction regarding the usefulness of a Greek education:

I take it as admitted by men of sense, that the first of our advantages is education; and not only this our more noble form of it, which disregards rhetorical ornaments and glory, and holds to salvation, and [to] beauty in the objects of our contemplation: but even that external culture which many Christians ill-judgingly abhor, as treacherous and dangerous, and keeping us afar from God. . . . so from secular literature we have received principles of enquiry and speculation, while we have rejected their idolatry.¹¹⁸

He calls people who scoff at Greek learning “boorish and uneducated” and states that they are not at all to be imitated.¹¹⁹ In fact, to do so would “dishonor education.”¹²⁰ He does not want simply to submit *paideia* to Christ, he wants “to offer an equivalent counterpart to the non-Christian poetical tradition also from a formal point of view.”¹²¹

Gregory’s indebtedness to the classical tradition is most evident in the 17,000 verses of poetry that he composed.¹²² Most of it he wrote late in his life, as a rather “embittered old man,” having left Constantinople in 381 in compromised circumstances.¹²³ His poetry displays his mastery over every metrical style and genre, as does his vocabulary, which is antiquated and literary compared with the contemporary Greek of his time. His poetry reveals several important details concerning his relationship to *paideia*. He writes poetry to keep himself balanced; it is a consolation to him in his old age; it “sweetens the bitterness of the commandments” in teaching virtue; and, typically, it offers Christians the chance to compete with pagans in learning.¹²⁴ It is significant as well that Gregory uses titles for Christ or God that Homer and Hesiod had employed especially for Zeus: ἐπιτάρροθος, μεδέων, μητίετα, ὑψιμέδων.¹²⁵

¹¹⁶PG 37.1449, as quoted in Greek in Athanassiadi, 9.

¹¹⁷Meehan, *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus*, 80.

¹¹⁸Gregory Nazianzus “The Panegyric on S. Basil,” 11, in *NPNF*, second series, vol. 7, 398–99.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Ibid.

¹²¹Kristoeffel Demoen, “The Attitude towards Greek Poetry in the Verse of Gregory Nazianzus,” 239.

¹²²Ibid., 238.

¹²³Ibid.

¹²⁴Gregory Nazianzus *Carm.* 2.1. 39; PG 37.1329–38.

¹²⁵Ibid., 240.

From the two *Invectives* against Julian, it appears that Gregory hated Julian much more for daring to hegemonize Greek philosophy and letters than for denying Christ. Julian brought Homer, Hesiod, and Herodotus “out of the closet” for Gregory. With some abandon Gregory writes of his love of letters:

Let everyone share in my indignation [against Julian] who takes pleasure in words, and is addicted to this pursuit—of which number I will not deny that I am one. . . . Words alone I cleave to, and I do not begrudge the toils by land and sea, that have supplied me with them. May mine be the possession of words, and his, too, whoever loves me, which possession I embraced . . . so that if, according to Pindar, ‘what is one’s own weighs heavily,’ speech in their defense is incumbent upon me; . . . and it is especially just for me to express my gratitude to words for words by word of mouth.”¹²⁶

This helps in part to explain why his two *invectives* against Julian are so deeply personal and gratuitously *ad hominem*.

It is at the end of the *First Invective* that Gregory reaches the heart of the argument and tries to save his beloved philosophy in the face of this new religion. He accuses Julian of saying, “Ours are the words and the speaking of Greek whose right it is to worship the gods: yours are irrationality and clownishness and nothing beyond the faith in your own doctrine.”¹²⁷ Gregory asks his deceased opponent,

Whose property are the words of the Greek language? . . . You must either assert that they belong to the religion or else to the nation which first invented the meaning of the language. If you say Greek belongs to the religion, [ἑρπαιεία] where does it show the rule of sacrifices and priests? . . . Since all nations do not have the same teaching, nor does any single one have the sole possession of them nor the same rites; as it is laid out by your sacred interpreters and directors of sacrifice. . . . For which gods or demons do you pretend that speaking Greek is reserved? O philhellene and philologist do you intend to debar us from speaking Greek?¹²⁸

He concludes by calling Julian a “barbarian” if his answer is “yes.” For Gregory, Greek *paideia* is the cultural medium he is not willing to let Julian control. He confesses that the philosophers can instruct partially in virtue, but certainly not to the heights of “that deification for which we were born.”¹²⁹ But this is as much as he will allow. Because he is in such a defensive position in these *Invectives*, Gregory is not free to show that he shares a significant cultural heritage with Julian.

¹²⁶Gregory Nazianzus *Oration* 4, “First *Invective* Against Julian,” in C. W. King, trans., *Julian*, 100.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*, 102, 103.

¹²⁸*Ibid.*, 103, 105.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, 121–23.

Even Gregory's rhetorical strategies against Julian exemplify the conflict between his two identities. For him, Julian deserves the greatest punishments for his apostasy. In fact, he deserves his death, and Gregory strongly—and proudly—suggests, as does Libanius, that a Christian killed him. Gregory condones violence in two other instances as well: when Christian hooligans pulled down the statue of the Mother of the Gods and when Julian's father and brother were killed.¹³⁰ He goes so far as to chastise Julian for not feeling gratitude that his own life was spared. Gregory says that Julian is the evil product of the empire, and he is disgusted by the fact that he has professed his impiety and shown that he is embarrassed at ever having been Christian.

In this "Christian" mode of discourse, he reverts to apocalyptic images that hearken to the days before Constantine. Gregory speaks in fiery terms of demons, the glory of martyrdom, divine wrath and punishment for sinful Julian, and, ultimately, of Julian's ignominious death, "For the apostate of Christ, who had once saved him," . . . "all the things that have fallen upon the perpetrators themselves are evident and public manifestations of God's anger at such doings."¹³¹ Gregory, resorting to the language of martyrdom, whips up honor and admiration for Christian intransigence. He censures the use of force in emperor worship, but sanctions force in Christian resistance.

Yet Gregory does seem uncomfortable with this defensive Christian rhetoric. He has a "Roman" mode of discourse as well, with which he is much more accustomed. His world, too, is the Roman world, and in his view of divine history, since Emperor Constantine, God has deigned the Roman world to be Christian. In his *Second Invective* he assumes the traditional Roman argument for defeat in battle, changing only the deity. Not only did Julian lose to the Persians, he embarrassed the troops and humiliated the Roman empire by having to accept such vile conditions of surrender from the Persians.¹³² His impassioned arguments for the universality of Greek *paideia* fit under his Roman citizen mode, his "Roman" discourse. Gregory was much more comfortable with a supercessionist Christianity that controlled the Roman empire than a defensive, sectarian, apocalyptic Christianity, which needed to adopt a furtive stance against the world. This was not the kind of Christianity Gregory grew up in; it belonged to a world of the past.

For Gregory, Roman *civitas* and Christianity fit neatly together. He says in the *First Invective* that since the time of Constantine, "the Word of Salvation was spread abroad, and prevailed the most in our parts of the world, the attempt to change or upset the status of the Christians was no other than to toss about the

¹³⁰Ibid., 45; *Oration 5*, "Second Invective Against Julian," in C. W. King, trans., *Julian*, 40.

¹³¹Ibid., "First Invective," 21–22; "Second Invective," 2.

¹³²Ibid., "Second Invective," 17, under the newly elected Jovinian.

Roman empire, and endanger the whole commonwealth.”¹³³ There was no conflict as he saw it: Christianity must control and define Roman religious identity, philosophy, and politics. Because, according to Christian discourse, punishment and reward are meted out in the next world, the answer to the question of how civilization or society deals with the impious is already fairly predetermined. Hence Gregory’s disturbing condonation of violence in his *Invectives*.

Without any hesitation, Gregory takes up Julian’s challenge for control of *paideia*. Even though he fights for his personal identity in this challenge, he also believes that Christianity must authenticate the discourse of Greek learning. Simply stated, for Gregory, truth comes from *paideia*. *Paideia* was his cultural heritage as much as it was for the pagans. For him, Christianity without Greek learning was unimaginable.

■ Conclusion

Julian’s policies during his imperial reign precipitated a crisis of religion as identity. The usefulness of Asad’s critique of Geertz’s theory of religion is demonstrated in the following three aspects. First, for Julian, Libanius, and Gregory Nazianzus religion is a public matter, not one confined to conscience, private life, or personal belief. Second, it is precisely Julian’s power that provides the authority and legitimacy for the ownership and reproduction of culture, as the imperial office sees fit, while spurring Libanius and Gregory on to their different positions. Finally, in the struggles to define religious identity, each man turns to the dominant culture formed during the Constantinian period, yet each one idealizes different aspects of the pre-Constantinian culture to suit his purposes. Each deploys it in specific ways to present his religious identity as the only legitimate one for a civilized person of the *oikoumene*.

Above all, the postcolonial critique allows us to view *paideia*, Greek culture, as a “strategy of survival.”¹³⁴ The lives and writings of Julian, Libanius, and Gregory go through elaborate “translations of culture,” that, although not connected to trafficking in slaves from Africa to America or to European colonial policies, nevertheless exemplify a history of cultural displacement.¹³⁵ As they assume *paideia* in various forms, each man reveals the complicated process of his emerging identity, which is ultimately made known in his religion. Because culture is a “realized signifying system,” *paideia*’s “authentic past” legitimates each man’s identity and his religion.¹³⁶

Culture is both the commodity that defines their religion, and that which is “always transformed and reproduced at the level of the dominant.”¹³⁷ Gregory, Julian, and to a lesser degree Libanius, separate religion and Greek culture in order

¹³³Ibid., “First Invective,” 76.

¹³⁴Bhabha, *Location*, 172.

¹³⁵Ibid.

¹³⁶Ibid., 173; Williams, *Sociology*, 207.

¹³⁷Williams, *Sociology*, 191.

to control both of them. Yet paradoxically, they convey the fact that religion and culture are intimately connected. They vie for the control of Greek *paideia*; for in this, they acknowledge, lies power. "The process of cultural translation is inevitably enmeshed in conditions of power."¹³⁸ All three men claim a received tradition that they modify in each translation, imbuing it with the specificities of place, context, and social value.¹³⁹

For Julian, the civilized way of life was made manifest in a uniform pagan identity that excluded Christians. Like a mirror image of Julian, Gregory usurped the cultural production of learning for the Christian, barring pagans by definition. Both used *paideia* as a tool of exclusion. In an anachronistic way, Libanius retained the vestiges of the dominant culture of perhaps the very early fourth century, promoting a way of life that had practically no likelihood of being widely accepted. One is "increasingly aware in this process of cultural ownership and production of the construction of culture and the invention of tradition."¹⁴⁰ Identity is their invention as well.

Nevertheless, there remain some significant differences in the way each reproduced *paideia*, and this appears in some way determined by their religious identities. Libanius's view on *paideia* and religion stemmed from his reverence for the age-old institutions of the Greek *polis*, which witnessed a decrease in imperial support during his lifetime. Nevertheless, *paideia* and the religion it fostered was still so deeply integrated in the society that Libanius wrote with the confidence and integrity of one who thinks his cultural views can prevail.¹⁴¹ That there was a significant number of people in the empire who as Christians would be unable to participate in the civilization gnawed at Libanius. But this fact was not sufficient to dislodge his views—itsself a testimony to the tenacity of Greek culture. Despite his circumstances, Libanius reproduced his culture, religion, and identity from the "conditions of dominance."¹⁴²

Julian, on the other hand, created a religious identity that claimed dominance, yet was actually residual. Because he was working against the backdrop of a former Christian identity and empire, Julian patched together a pagan identity from a wide variety of cultural institutions that had been dominated by Christians for forty years. His use of *paideia* can be traced to "work made in earlier and often different societies and times, yet still available and significant."¹⁴³ He comes to these cultural institutions as an outsider, and they appeal to him intellectually, yet it is notable that traces of Christianity are persistently visible in Julian's religious pro-

¹³⁸Asad, "Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology," in idem, *Genealogies*, 198.

¹³⁹Bhabha, *Location*, 172.

¹⁴⁰Ibid.

¹⁴¹Ibid.

¹⁴²Williams, *Sociology*, 204.

¹⁴³Ibid.

gram. Julian's religious identity is best understood in light of R. Williams's statement that "the residual, though its immediate processes are reproductive, is often a form of cultural *alternative* to the dominant in its most recent reproductive forms."¹⁴⁴ Because of this, Julian does not retain the sense of Libanius's dominant religion, that this is the "natural, normal" identity in the Roman world.¹⁴⁵ In particular, Julian echoes Christianity's *modus operandi* by turning pagan practices into a formal institution that one must join, and whose mores one must live by. Thus Julian's religious identity fits well within the postcolonial understanding of the residual.

Gregory Nazianzus's assumption of *paideia* bespeaks innovation that is not reactionary—in both senses of the word—like Julian's. Although Gregory grew up Christian in a Christian empire, he elaborated upon the experience of being the dominant power, arrogating *paideia* to the Christians' purview. Gregory's emphasis on *paideia*, while not completely at the instigation of Julian, can be understood as an emergent form of cultural reproduction.¹⁴⁶ In claiming Greek learning for the Christians, he augments the traditional Christian identity in an innovative way. He builds his concept of Christian religious identity on the pre-Constantinian pagan *paideia*. The comparatively short reign of Julian and the resurgence of Christianity after his death afforded Gregory the opportunity to make a different form of Christianity normative for the empire, one based on inherited tradition and custom, rather than allegiance. Yet it would be several centuries before Christian empire would make this form of Christianity universal.

In the process of showing the different concepts of religion for each of these men, postcolonialist critique makes it clear why Geertz's essentialized concept of religion has no heuristic utility for understanding religion in the fourth-century. By contrast, Asad's theories enable us to explore this period from the fractious interior; each of the figures we have discussed worked to create a viable identity, based on both his own accommodations to political power and, more importantly, on his use of the concept of *paideia* to assert cultural dominance. The need for Julian, Libanius, and Gregory Nazianzus to elaborate upon religion as a "cipher for identity" was precipitated by the instability of the political circumstances in each man's *local* situation. Suffering the murders of his relatives, separated from his brother in exile, and having to study with famous teachers clandestinely, Julian felt the oppression of his Christian cousins acutely and personally. Throughout his long life, Libanius consistently responded in a cautious manner to the infractions to the civic welfare of Antioch caused by Christians in power. And, although Gregory Nazianzus enjoyed the privileges of Christian empire, before Julian's advent,

¹⁴⁴Ibid., 204–5.

¹⁴⁵Ibid.

¹⁴⁶Ibid.

he spent a great deal of effort battling all the varieties of Arianism and fending off ecclesiastical responsibilities. In short, none of these men created their religious identity from a secure position of power, yet each asserted this identity *as if* he were in the authoritative position. Religion for each of them was anything but a distilled set of symbols that elicit set moods or evoke motivations; rather, religion set the parameters of life for each—in the manner of “throwing down the gauntlet.”